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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAN EVELYN WHEELER

OTTAWA FOR CONS, POL, ECON AND PD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PBTS](#) [CASC](#) [ECON](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS MEET SIX-HOUR DELAY AT
CANADIAN PORT OF ENTRY

1. Summary. On Sunday, January 30, 2005, fifteen busloads of U.S. high school students were delayed for six hours at the St. Bernard-Lacolle (Lacolle) port of entry (POE) into Canada. The students were headed for a ski weekend at Mt. Tremblant. The tour organizer believes his group was trapped in one of the work slowdowns that Canadian border inspectors themselves have well publicized. The Consul General, citing welfare responsibilities for U.S. citizens as well as interest in facilitation of cross-border travel and commerce, faxed a letter of inquiry to the Lacolle Port Director to request an update on entry processing at Canada's largest port of entry in Quebec. (Text of the letter is provided below.) End summary.

2. On Sunday morning (January 30), Montreal's duty officer received a call from a U.S. citizen whose company organizes weekend ski trips for U.S. high school students. Fifteen busloads of students headed for a weekend at Mt. Tremblant were seriously delayed at the Lacolle POE into Canada, on Interstate 87 south of Montreal. Reportedly, the buses had arrived around 3:00 am, and by 7:30 am only three buses had been cleared into Canada. By 9:00 am, two additional buses were allowed entry. The tour organizer believes the buses were trapped in one of the work slowdowns which Canadian border inspectors themselves have well publicized.

3. The duty officer spoke to the Canadian supervisor at the port, who said they were carefully inspecting each bus because they found several students with false identification and "indications there might be drugs." He said they had past problems with student ski trip buses carrying quantities of drugs. He said buses in which they found no problems were being cleared "in ten minutes," but admitted ten buses were still waiting at the port.

4. The tour organizer had asked for USG assistance because the students were not allowed off the buses and had been unable to get breakfast during the long wait. In fact, Canadian authorities never detained the buses. The Port Supervisor told the tour leaders they were free to return to Champlain, NY at any time to have breakfast, but they also said the buses would have to requeue at the end of the line upon return. If the tour leaders felt their passengers' welfare was threatened, they could have turned back into New York, although admittedly the added delay would have doomed their weekend of skiing.

5. It is possible the Canadian border inspectors "work-to-rule" tactics were partially responsible for the delay. At 7:00 am Sunday (1/30), the Canadian Border Security Agency website reported two-hour delays crossing at Lacolle, which seem far longer than a normal Sunday morning. At the same time, however, we have no solid basis to question the Port Supervisor's claim that some in-depth inspections were necessary. Although the tour organizer said no drugs have ever been found on his trips, it is possible that Canadian inspectors find contraband on buses arranged by other companies, and therefore prudently inspect all such groups.

6. Nonetheless, taking more than six hours to inspect 5 out of 15 buses is excessive. Unless authorities were actually finding drugs among these particular passengers (and we have not heard anything to indicate they did), the length of the inspection seems unreasonable. This raises concerns about the treatment of U.S. tour groups and the movement of commerce through the Lacolle POE.

7. The Consul General sent a letter of inquiry to the Lacolle Port Director (a recent IVP grantee). Text of the letter (dated February 1) follows:

Mr. Jean Cheney
Port Director
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Rte 15
St. Bernard de Lacolle
(Quebec) Canada J0J 1V0

Dear Mr. Cheney:

I am writing to bring to your attention a particularly serious delay that occurred at the St. Bernard - Lacolle port of entry (POE) on Sunday, January 30, 2005, that affected a significant number of U.S. high school students. The following is a synopsis of what transpired on the morning of January 30, 2005.

Sunday morning (January 30), U.S. Consulate General Montreal's duty officer received a report that 15 buses carrying a group of U.S. high school students for a ski weekend at Mt. Tremblant were seriously delayed at the St Bernard - Lacolle POE. Reportedly, the buses had arrived around 0300 hours and, by 0730 hours only three buses had been cleared into Canada. By 0900 hours, reportedly only two additional buses had been processed.

The Consulate General's Consular Section Chief, Gary Sheaffer, spoke with the port's supervisor on duty. The supervisor reported that port inspectors were carefully inspecting each bus because they found several students with false identification and indications there might be drugs. He said they had had past problems with student ski trip buses carrying quantities of drugs. He said buses in which they found no problems were being cleared "in ten minutes," but admitted ten buses were still waiting at the port.

Reportedly, the students were not allowed off the buses and had been unable to get breakfast during the long wait. Admittedly, the tour organizer had an option to return to Champlain, NY at any time for breakfast. He noted, however, that the prospect of having to requeue, adding a further delay to the trip, may have doomed the group's ski weekend.

The more than six hours it took to clear the buses seems excessive, unless authorities actually were finding drugs among these particular passengers. We have not heard anything to indicate that the high schools students were carrying drugs.

In light of the Consulate's responsibilities to inform prospective American citizen travelers about possible travel hazards or problems, I respectfully request an update on the state of entry processing at St. Bernard - Lacolle, Canada's largest port of entry in Quebec. As such delays adversely affect cross-border travel and commerce, I also am seeking your intervention to ensure reasonable inspections that will facilitate a smooth flow of people and goods across the St. Bernard - Lacolle border.

Sincerely,

Bernadette M. Allen
Consul General
U.S. Consulate General
Montreal

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